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AUTHOR John, Vera P.; Leacock, Eleanor
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ABSTRACT

The present trend in writings on school has shifted somewhat from the documentation of educational inadequacies and inequities and suggestions for their reform, to analyses of the role schooling plays in out society generally. While the efforts of educationally disenfranchised communities to achieve some influence and control over the schooling of their children has slowed, it has not ceased. Such efforts can give direction to those who still seek ways to improve education for the poor. The first section of this focuses on the social context of teaching from the viewpoint of an anthropologist. The second follows through on the implications of individual learning from the standpoint of a psychologist. Three basic arguments are put forth: (1) that a new process-oriented education for poor children cannot be implemented in schools which have failed to resolve the ideological tensions between oppressed communities and their educational institutions; (2) that the focus on children as targets of change in the war on poverty--a focus which did not include entire communities in programmatic efforts to eradicate poverty--created new problems without necessarily solving old ones; and, (3) that teachers cannot respond productively to the learning and thinking styles of children which are different from their own unless we develop new forms and structures for schooling. (Author/JM)

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TRANSFORMING THE STRUCTURE OF FAILURE

Vera P John, University of New Mexico
Eleanor Leacock, City College, CUNY

Introduction

There is ample ground for discouragement about the possibilities of improving schooling for the poor. Despite some two decades of stepped-up activity and debate on the part of both educational personnel and community groups around the need for better schooling for children of the poor, and especially children of the non-white poor, it appears that the inequality of schooling along class and race lines remains substantially unaltered. Yet there have been many small successes during this period, which have clearly demonstrated that teachers can in fact teach poor children if given adequate encouragement and material support, and that these children are for the most part eager to learn.

The present trend in writings on schools has shifted somewhat from the documentation of educational inadequacies and inequities and suggestions for their reform, to analyses of the role schooling plays in our society generally. On the whole these writings give little grounds for optimism about possibilities for substantial and meaningful school reform, revealing, as they do, how intricately the schools are locked in to the structuring of class in our society. Nonetheless, while the efforts of educationally disenfranchised communities to achieve some influence and control over the schooling of their children has slowed, it has not ceased. It is the purpose of this paper

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to suggest that such efforts can give direction to educators and scholars like ourselves who are still seeking the ways to improve education for poor and hence for all children.

The continuing efforts on the part of the poor to improve schooling for their children can be significant for educational programming in relation to three critical problem areas, the relation of schooling to employment, the content of curricula, and the motivation of teachers. Attempts of the poor to influence schooling are often linked with attempts to achieve some control over other basic needs, such as access to good and inexpensive health care, to pleasant home and neighborhood environments, and especially to good jobs. This is in keeping with recent discussions of educational innovation that address themselves to the problem of a direct and meaningful (rather than indirect and pernicious) relation between schooling and access to employment.

Furthermore, community movements to achieve some control over schools are usually based in racially segregated neighborhoods or ethnic enclaves, black, native American, Chicano, where a sense of cultural awareness calls into question, not only discriminatory educational practices, but also the infusion of ethnocentric, racist, and non-humanistic attitudes into school curricula and teaching methods. This concern tallies with the educational theorist's interest in rational and humanistic scientific training, in place of an all too often narrow and bigotted morality and ideology that is antithetical to true education. Thus in basic educational outlook, though it may often not be obvious on the surface, community

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attempts to change schools may level a criticism at the content of schooling that is in some ways in accord with general criticisms of our education from Dewey on.

Finally, with regard to teachers themselves, and in spite of past history, community movements can open up possibilities for increasing their satisfactions and reducing their frustrations by improving their relations with poor parents. Although school issues where the poor are concerned have so often been structured by the course of political events in terms of parent-teacher hostility, and student-teacher hostility (as parents formerly deplored as uninterested suddenly become over-interested, in the "wrong way"), there have been sufficient instances where teachers became enthusiastic participants in school reform in cooperation with parents to indicate that this possibility exists. For educational innovation to succeed, it is essential that it tie in with the desire of teachers as professionals for success in their work.

The present paper explores the structure of failure in the schooling of poor children, and suggests some of the potentials that exist for restructuring toward success in the light of the above. The first section focusses on the social context of teaching from the viewpoint of an anthropologist. The second follows through on the implications for individual learning from the standpoint of a psychologist. The authors are mindful of the fact that the two orientations are not as yet successfully integrated in the present paper, but look forward to the discussions about to take place in Chicago to help bring about a fuller synthesis.

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Part I - The Structure of Teaching

The past two decades of discussion about the school failure of poor children and its sources have made increasingly clear the extent to which this failure is socially patterned. Dishearteningly, however, a backward glance at some hundred years of public education shows that general understanding of educational problems moves anywhere but consistently ahead. Instead, an historical glance shows that old mystifications keep recurring in new guises. The widespread recognition that school failures are socially determined and comprise a structure, has not prevented interpretations of these failures in terms that, like old biologically based arguments, still blame social victims for their own victimage. The somewhat recent concept of an incapacitating "culture of poverty," so early learned as to be virtually irreversable by school age, has either replaced, or simply co-exists, with old arguments about inbred class-linked inferiority, or innate race-caste-linked inferiority. The culture of poverty concept has confused efforts to analyse the structure of school failure with the incisiveness that is necessary if meaningful points for intervention are to be located and the directions of this intervention defined.

By their very nature, social structures become intricately interlocking systems that are resistant to rationally planned change. In fact, it can be a constant frustration to would-be reformers to find their efforts to change an institution nullified by their incorporation into some aspect of its supporting structure. The concept of a conflict between an institution's manifest function, and the latent functions it also fulfills, as

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suggested by Robert Merton, is helpful for discussing the resistance of the school system to rational reform. The manifest function of schooling in contemporary Western society, is to educate children in the formal sense, to train individuals to use their particular skills and abilities for their personal realization and self-sufficient participation in society, and for the adequate functioning of the society as a whole. The latent function of schooling is to socialize children for differing occupational roles in society that parallel, by and large, those of their parents, thereby maintaining the present status structure while allowing for minor shifts in specific occupational categories. Other latent functions the schools fulfill are: provision of custodial care for children; provision of employment for large numbers of people; and provision of avenues to political careers for some.

The conflict between the humanistic commitment to the ideal of equal opportunity as essential in a democratic society, the manifest function of schooling, and its latent function of preserving the status quo, has given rise to the bitter rationale for educational failure: those who fail are asserted to do so by virtue of their own inadequacy, not that of the schools. In the intermeshing of social functions, the overt "manifest" goal of schooling is in fact submerged by its latent functions. The fulcrum most effective for bringing about change is obscured.

A goodly number of often quite fine studies has documented the ways in which overlapping institutional structures pattern the actions and choices of individuals so as to conspire, in effect, constantly to reproduce the structure of school

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inequality and failure despite repeated attempts at reform. An early study of teacher career patterns by Becker ("The Career of the Chicago Public Schoolteacher," AJS LVII), Hollingshead's Elmtown's Youth, and Havighurst and Neugarten's Society and Education, among many other works, showed some of the indirect ways in which class differentials in the accessibility of adequate education come about and are maintained, and these were studied or discussed explicitly by Sexton in Education and Income and Conant in Slums and Suburbs. Many works have described in detail the way deeply patterned attitudes of superiority by race and class are expressed in repressive and punitive teaching practices in crowded, underequipped, and under staffed schools in ghetto areas. Fuchs has analysed the defensive affirmation of socially derogatory attitudes towards poor and black children by teachers trying to cope with the difficulties of the urban classroom, as they become themselves socialized by the school environment. (Teachers Talk; also Pickets At the Gates) My own study of urban schools (Teaching & Learning in City Schools) expresses the effect of socially based derogatory teacher attitudes on teaching practices, as does an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Hartley. In a collection of critical papers, (Leacock, ed., Culture of Poverty: A Critique) two teachers, Castro and Lester, recount their own experiences and the mix of objective and subjective difficulties they met in ghetto schools; one is a story of success, the other of failure.

At the administrative level, Rogers' study of 110 Livingston Street indicates ways in which bureaucratic inefficiency, pork-barrelling, and careerism reinforce patterns of unequal education; and some of the chapters in Rubinstein's School

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Against Children, along with various political commentaries and analyses reveal the influence of real estate and other business and political interests on neighborhood demography, school districting, and the double track structure of education. The intricate totality of structured inequities emerges whereby the schools are interwoven into the class and race statuses of our society and serve to maintain these statuses. Where, then, is the source of change?

Teachers themselves have long been seen as an obvious choice for intervention. After all, teachers are ultimately the ones who either teach or fail to teach. Furthermore, teachers are accessible, first as captive audiences in teacher-training institutions and later on their jobs. Certainly, one cannot deny the desirability of arming teachers with skill and understanding. Nor can the fact be denied that individual teachers are the ones in a position to make critical differences in the lives of individual children. However, it is equally true that despite all manner of training programs and good intentions, and despite gains made in particular projects, once the flurry of attention is over, the overwhelming tendency is for a school to fall back into the established pattern whereby teachers project expectations of failure onto children of the poor. For the tragedy is that school failure is virtually taught to poor children, and not only by those teachers who are harsh and punitive, but also by those who start out aiming to do a good job and who become frustrated by their own failure. If I may quote myself:

> Within this structure, teachers are both the victims and the villains, a position which has caused them

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> great stress and confusion in the recent battles fought over the education of black and Puerto Rican children. Teachers, after all, daily face the children in the classroom, and have the responsibility of teaching them. However, as cogs in a machine so structured that teaching is wellnigh impossible in low-income schools,... only the most gifted and insightful among them do not fail. Hence teachers both are and are not responsible, and hence the bitterness and anger surrounding attempts to restructure the educational system. (Hence, too, the perfect setting for "divide and rule" ploys by those in positions of real decision making and responsibility.) Teachers may ultimately be frustrated by a situation in which they have not been successful at their trade, but most of them have adapted to it either by accepting outright racist rationales for their failure with the poor and the black, or by grasping at the "culture of poverty" rationale. Only a few have found ways to act on the understanding of how their failure is built into the very structure of the school system and from their own restricted position within it. Jonathan Kozol, author of Death at an Early Age, is an example, and he was expelled from the Boston school system as a consequence of his dissidence. (Culture of Poverty: a Critique, pp. 28-29).

The intricate complex whereby poor children are in effect taught not to learn what they are being taught at school, by teachers who think they are trying to teach, was revealed to me at least in part during the course of visiting second and fifth grade classrooms in four New York City schools. The schools were randomly chosen with great care from neighborhoods that contrasted by income and race, yet the social directives that we saw being conveyed to the children by relatively good and hard working teachers, matched so closely standard expectations for the roles they would play in adult society, that it would almost appear we had chosen the schools as ideal types after observing them. The obvious differences in school facilities and degree of utilization between middle and low income schools were best illustrated by a chart on the wall of the principal's office in the

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low-income all-white school. It showed the schedule for toileting the children, so complicated was this logistic problem in a school run on three sessions since class size had been reduced. Ultimately more cogent, however, were the contrasting messages that were indirectly transmitted to the low as compared with middle-income, the black as compared with white, children, through the curriculum content, the teaching management practices, and the style of teacher-student relations. The absence of poor and non-white children from school materials (a situation still far from adequately rectified) was reinforced, unwittingly, by such "neutral" items on the wall as, in one low-income all black classroom, a chart of "free lunch children" as the only exhibited mention of any children's names. (No monitors, class officers, mentions in relation to projects, etc.)

In place of the often vacuous but at least non-punitive "very nice," and "very good" of the teachers in the middle-income white classrooms (doubtless exaggerated for our benefit), there was a disproportionate rate of negative response to children in the low-income all black fifth grade, even to the point of finding fault with correct answers. Anaysis of teacher-student interchanges further revealed the impossibility of contructive teaching, building on the children's experiences, when their lives are seen in stereotyped and derogatory terms. Comparison of classroom management practices showed striking differences in the way children were being trained to handle the work situation. The middle-income white fifth grade was replete with committees of all kinds, while, despite considerable evidence of group responsibility and individual initiative in the low-income black fifth grade, the work scene was structured in a completely authoritarian teacher-

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to-individual-child manner (although the teacher herself was not particularly authoritarian in her personal style.) Goal-setting statements for the children were at a minimum in this classroom, by contrast with the white middle-income classroom; and, while in the latter class the teacher felt positive or neutral (according to a careful rating of teacher interview material) towards children who as a group scored 11 points higher on IQ tests than those toward whom she felt negative, the reverse was true in the black classroom. Yet the teacher of this class was herself black, and was not unkind or unconcerned. The structure of failure is in some respects obvious, but it has dimensions that are subtle and complex.

The community movements for desegregation and integration, and, subsequently, for community control, were aimed at rectifying the obvious and gross inequalities in the school system. For the most part little, as we know, has been done. I recall one Junior High school, all black, located within one block of its northern district boundary; the next block fell into a basically white neighborhood. Stein has commented on the fact that, while it appears impossible to district schools in New York City for fuller integration, it is easy enough to jerrymander election districts to break up racial and ethnic constituencies. In those instances where integration took place, old patterns of segregation asserted themselves, segregated classes on a grade, different groupings in a classroom. Other lip-service attempts at desegregation led (and lead) to sure failure, as, for example, badly planned bussing programs run into obvious opposition.

The goal of community control that followed the

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disillusionment with integration attempts, aimed at shifting the basic pattern of parent-school relations, by enabling heretofore low-status parents, vis a vis the school system, to become, in Kleiff's terms, "people of substance." In spite of endless problems, there were successes here and there, and a new enthusiasm and optimism as changing expectations were projected onto children. But community control "won" only to be lost, for powerless community boards were created to become additional buffers between the schools and the community, with no real change in the relations between them.

It is not surprising, then, that a number of recent works take a fundamentally pessimistic view of schooling altogether. Illich and Reimer make the point that schooling really amounts to an elaborate and expensive way of sorting the upper class groups for success and the lower class groups for failure, while convincing the poor who fail that it is their own fault. Other studies document the extent to which family status and not school performance determine income level, and the extent to which schools have always failed the poor. The "deschooling" of society, and a guaranteed income unrelated to school performance, are raised as more meaningful social goals than reform of a recalcitrant school system.

Nonetheless, community groups are in fact continuing the attempt to influence schools. Indian Americans in both the United States and Canada are involved in such attempts. If New York City is at all characteristic, urban parents in low-income and ghetto neighborhoods persist in their efforts to make school boards heed their wishes. And, again if New York is not unusual, School of Education programs are still concerned with innovative teaching aimed at improving the school experience for poor and

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non-white children. While the positions of Illich and Reimer are important for clarifying the depth and extent of the school problem, (and while they are of immediate relevance to those countries that are now rapidly expanding their school systems), they are at present somewhat remote from the immediate endeavors of poor parents to improve their children's education. Seen in the light of these endeavors, which are aimed at a direct and meaningful relation between schooling and employment, the present indirect and somewhat pernicious relation becomes itself a focal point for structuring changes, rather than a difficult but fortuitous problem.

The assumption is, then, that schooling, as a fundamental social process can best be transformed in conjunction with the efiorts of the people affected to transform it; and that the efforts of the poor to influence schooling to become a realistic and meaningful avenue to job opportunities (as it has been in affluent communities) contributes the objective basis for changing teacher's expectations for poor children. The further assumption is that it is through working out specific avenues, through schooling, toward stable occupations for children, that parents' desires for their children can mesh with the desire of teachers, as professinnals, to achieve satisfaction in their work, despite the backlog of antagonism that may in many cases have to be overcome.

It is important to state that in talking of realistic expectations about avenues toward employment, we are by no means talking of narrow programs of vocational training. Instead, as suggested above, the fact that the poor are so largely based in ethnically aware enclaves introduces into their

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concern with education the humanistic emphasis on opening up, broadening out, diversifying goals. Each group may have its own interests, but the total calls for the restatement of educational goals in culturally pluralist terms. My own immediate experience in this respect is not at the elementary, but at the college level. The policy of open enrollment at the City College, University of New York, was met by a well-publicized antagonism and expression of frustration on the part of a faculty accustomed to training an elite student body. Less evident were the innovative and empathetic efforts on the part of some faculty, for whom working with under-educated students carried its own intellectual and social content. The point here is that accumulated experiences such as these across the country are calling forth a searching review of educational goals generally. The need for diversification of these goals is made explicit in the Educational Testing Service report by the "Panel on Alternate Approaches to Graduate Education."

The second section of this paper elaborates on the significance the opening up of the curriculum can have in relation to the learning process for young children. The last general point I shall mention here concerns what the restructuring of their relations with parents means for teachers. In one sense it is asking a lot of them, for it means shifting the institutionalized inequalities that have been basic to school functioning. The question should be dealt with openly, and the discomfort and uneasiness that it entails, as well as the ultimate promise of satisfaction with their work that success would entail. It would be important to make clear that they are being asked to activize the commitment to cultural pluralism and the value of the individual, that are traditionally taught as ideals, although systematically contradicted

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by the realities of schooling. At this juncture of human history, we have reached a technological level that makes a diversity of individual goals and avenues to adult 'success' a practical possibility. Increasingly, if humanity is to survive as a species, it is becoming a necessity.

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The Structure of Failure: Part II*

Vera P. John

University of New Mexico

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Ten years ago, most of us in this room were academic gypsies. Our unstated motto was "have hope, will travel." Gordon and Wilkerson were working on their influential book on compensatory education and on issues of school integration; Bloom was arguing in favor of pre-school education, expressing the belief that the years between three and five were critical for a child's intellectual development. Many others spoke and wrote in the context of an emerging Federal policy, which was created through the relentless efforts of the poor. That policy belatedly and half-heartedly committed this nation to programs aimed at the realization of equal educational opportunity. The committment to decent schooling as a right of all citizens--a right which has never been adequately accessible to the children of the poor--was manifested in a variety of anti-poverty programs. We, the academic gypsies, were given a chance--and for many of us, it was for the first time--to combine scholarly pursuits with our social committment to the poor.

The need for compensatory education was documented in a variety of ways: the record of failure of the public schools was detailed; the statistics revealing inadequate housing, health care, recreational and educational facilities

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were compiled; unemployment rates were published. The especially heavy burden of poverty and oppression shouldered by the non-white communities was linked to the racism which pervades every aspect of this society.

In the face of these statistics which evidenced such a massive failure, it was argued that improvement could be wrought by means of a new allotment of Federal priorities. Representatives of the oppressed as well as many in government and education worked for and participated in the establishment of programs such as Headstart, Follow-Through and Upward Bound. They considered these efforts a step in the right direction.

Now that we are engaged in evaluating the record of the past decade in order to develop new perspectives for the decade to come, we must re-examine some of our basic premises. I suggest that we scrutinize more fully what we mean by "equal educational opportunity." Too often this concept has been described or defined through measures cataloguing the inequality of education, e.g. through drop-out rates (or push-out rates); reading retardation by the non-white or non-English speaking pupils; and in general through lower performance in schools on the part of poor children. Equal educational opportunity was thus viewed as a necessary means of reversing these conditions. It would mean a chance for those with previously inadequate schooling to obtain skills equivalent to those of white, urban, middle-class pupils. This approach to equal educational opportunity was limited to the acquisition of certain types of intellectual skills, i.e., those necessary for success in the American mainstream.

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In order to present an alternative interpretation of the concept of equal educational opportunity, I would like to examine two crucial aspects of the educational process: (1) some aspects of children's learning and (2) the social settings of learning.

Some Aspects of Children's Learning

In the context of compensatory education, children's engagement in learning is most frequently described in terms of performance. The focus is on the outcome--an outcome that is defined by measurements and standards of performance which are modeled on the achievements of the adults who developed the measuring tools. And thus, we come to speak of "the gap"--"the gap between "achievers" and "non-achievers" and between low and middle income groups--a pervasive and dangerous image for comparison and evaluation.

In the last decade, the preoccupation with performance measures did not preclude a different emphasis and growing interest in the processes of learning. A personal synthesis of some of these newer notions, which are in part derived from Piaget and in part from studies of language acquisition, will be presented in order to highlight some crucial issues in the education of the poor.

Children accomplish great intellectual feats during the years when they experience minimal or no formal tuition.

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Bower's work has shown that children categorize during their first two years of life--that they can process objects according to general properties at three months of age.[1] Piaget's well-known research on object permanence demonstrated the ways in which children order their environment. Ricutti's study of infants between 12 and 14 months of age concluded that they can group and classify objects.[2] In short, children are active, exploratory and energetic learners.

The truth of this statement is particularly striking in the examination of children's acquisition of language. During the first half of this century, it was assumed that imitation was the primary mechanism through which children developed their speech. But, once the actual processes of learning were recorded, in the settings in which language is acquired, an alternative picture emerged. Children pay attention to recurrent and simple phrases to which they are exposed in the context of shared activities. Based on such input, children construct their own unique phrases. For instance, when speaking in two-word utterances, young speakers will produce strings of words in ways in which they have never heard adults use them. They might say, "allgone Daddy" as well as "allgone milk."[3] This recognition of presence versus absence pervades the speech of all young children; these utterances were found in the speech of English, German and Russian two-year-olds.[4] Similarly, a child may say "more up"

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1. Bower, T.G.R. The visual world of infants. Scientific American, 1966, 80-94.
2. Ricutti, H.N. Object grouping and selective ordering behavior in infants 12 to 24 months old. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1965, 11, 129-148.
3. Braine, M.D.S. The ontogeny of English phrase structure: the first phrase. Language, 1963, 39, 1-13.
4. Slobin, D. as quoted by McNeil, D., The development of language, in: Mussen, P. Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology, Vol. I, 10

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meaning "I want to be picked up again" using "more" in a way that would be ungrammatical in adult speech, but which expresses the concept of repetition.

Children display powerful strategies for maximizing their communicative effectiveness at a stage of their development when their actual verbal means are limited. They achieve such a mastery, not by simple imitation and rewarded trials, but by analyzing adult speech for significant syntactic and semantic features; by testing their hypotheses about language; by over-generalizing when language is lacking in regularity; and by rehearsing their verbal approaches in the presence as well as in the absence of listeners. These efforts bespeak, once more, of active and categorically-tuned human minds, hungry for a chance to sort and order, to create some rhythm and sense out of a chaotic world that surrounds them.

Older children, too, display these self-motivated processes which can be best observed during their work and play situations. Eleanor Leacock found that children in Zambia were constantly developing and refining their linguistic, technical and numerical skills through their play and while working with their family elders. She observed children making complicated toys; playing an African checker-like game which involved successive additions and subtractions; making musical instruments and composing songs. Through these activities they were developing the very same cognitive skills that are urged upon children in a school environment.

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However, many of these activities differ sharply from the learning-teaching process inside the classroom. Children are treated as though they were empty slates at the start of a school-taught skill such as spelling. They are taught how to spell because it is assumed that children lack their own rules or approaches to spelling. But, if we examine children's spontaneous attempts to spell words, it is obvious that this is not the case. Their attempts at writing are akin to their earlier efforts at acquiring language; children produce temporary strategies for actualizing or depicting meaning, choosing selective features to de-code; they later modify or abandon these strategies. They may skip sounds that are barely audible; they will construct the best possible fit between what they hear, some knowledge of letters and sequences. Theirs is a combination of system and innovation in dealing with this match.[5] Children who are eager to write their own stories or riddles before they are competent spellers illustrate the importance of hypothesis-testing as a dominant mode in children's adaptive and learning behavior.

Even school age children continue these ways of learning outside of the school environment, through personal hobbies, sports and artistic endeavors. Their eagerness to learn sustains them thru long periods of quiet observation of older children and adults followed by practice in private, during which they test alternative approaches. A recent study by

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5. Riddle by Katya Tripp: "Peepl thnk tht bars are dandris but tht is not tru. I sleep with a baur and he nevr bathrs me." Answer: "Tete beurs." (Personal communication from Susan Ervin-Tripp who has gathered many other examples of children's spelling, all illustrating similar principles.)

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Cole et al[6] among the Kpelle children in Libera illustrates the way in which groups of children acquire competence in culturally significant tasks, such as tanning. In the acquisition of these cultural skills, private rehearsal was found to be of great importance as well.

The cultural and environmental context in which learning takes place is of decisive importance in determining the particular content of children's intellectual processes. For instance, in a recent study in Norway, Hollos[7] found that children who were tested by Piagetian tasks of conservation in the most isolated farm communities excelled those who lived in rural settlements or urban centers. These results can be interpreted as follows. The intensified demand for children's participation in the work efforts of an isolated farm created a particular cognitive result. The social necessity for carefully examining and thinking about all the operations involved in farm chores can lead to the acceleration of cognitive development among a group of children who have been traditionally described as deficient.

In contrast, in urban middle class settings the cognitive demand experienced by children is for the verbal manipulation of the world around them. It is in this latter environment that children learn to channel their discoveries, which many times consist of inferences rather than active manipulations of their environment. This process, though it may lack the

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6. Cole, M., Gay, J., Glick, J., and Sharp, D. W. The Cultural Context of Learning and Thinking. New York: Basic Books, 1971.
7. Hollos, Marinda. Ph.D. Dissertation, Berkely. Unpublished.

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opportunity for children to observe change as a consequence of their own socially productive activities, still provides an extraordinarily important skill for success in this society, i.e., a proficiency in language which consists of closely linked internal and external processes of representation and communication.

Children internalize external dialogue in the course of language acquisition. In contrast with other intellectual processes, language is a cognitive as well as a social process. Thus, interactions between learners and older members of a speech community are not only mandatory for the development of language proficiency, but also provide a shared context for its practice. Non-verbal learning is socially conditioned as well; but, the relationships between models and learners are less direct and less pervasive; children's observations of those who are experienced are intertwined with private practice and rehearsal.

The early learning of children, both in verbal and non-verbal domains, is open-ended. In most instances, children are free to choose when to interact, when to copy the behavior of others, or when to ask for advice and guidance. In school, they do not possess the same freedom. The teacher who provides the model for new learning is also a judge. This contradictory role in which teachers find themselves imposes serious tensions within the learning process which were not present earlier.

In this discussion, it was argued that the use of differential levels of children's performances as a yardstick of "equal educational opportunity" is both inadequate and harmful.

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Instead, we are proposing that the concept be examined in light of our growing knowledge about early, non-tuitional learning. Such an approach demands that we provide opportunities for learning, rather than manipulate measures of performance/failure.

Learning in Diverse Settings

If children are in fact active learners who approach their world with energy and curiosity, who reason while they play, who practice their language while splashing in their bathtubs, who contribute to their families by sharing in work in which they are capable -- why do so many of them become passive and inadequate once in school? Why do so many of them fail?

Schools which support active and functional learning in children, in a setting which is rooted in their community, do not produce failure. Two very different kinds of schools come to mind. One is the comfortable, friendly, non-competitive school--usually private--which services upper-middle children. The teachers are called by their first names; play and learning are woven together; the children are looked upon as capable and exciting. Those who can read get new books and those who do not are not pressured. The goal is universal literacy, but the time-table is determined by the child.

In a very different setting, in a Pueblo kindergarten class along theRio Grande, I saw a group of children as secure, active and comfortable with themselves and the many adults--both teachers and visitors--in their classroom as the children above. Their home-made books depicted a story of an abandoned Pueblo house; their teacher appeared in their storybooks dressed

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as a ghost for Halloween. The room was full of their paintings; they learned their numbers by charting their weight gain. The school is in the middle of the village; parents come in; workmen--Pueblo, Navajo and Anglo--who are building an additional classroom, drink their coffee in the classroom, and the children imitate their digging and building during their outdoor play.

This community is rooted in the long and continuous history of the Pueblos; they treasure their culture. At the same time, they have effectively developed new economic programs which have resulted in a higher standard of living for the entire Pueblo. The children are well-fed, comfortably dressed; many of them have been to other towns and cities, but none of them know luxury.

These two schools though thousands of miles apart and working with children from widely divergent backgrounds, share some crucial features. Each of them is an extension of the values and behavior patterns of the parent community; the children are able to learn in ways which do not conflict with their previous experiences.

The great majority of American schools, however, regardless of their stated goals, perform social functions which are reflections of national objectives. The schools described above have succeeded in meeting local needs.

For over a century, public schools in this country have been committed to imparting a common ideology to the children of immigrants, native people, colonized and enslaved people, and

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whites whose rural way of life is at variance with the values of a highly industrialized, consumer society. The training for punctuality, the teaching of certain beliefs, the myriad routines--all have served to create some common experiences for children whose lives outside of school vary enormously. The schools and the army thus serve to fashion a shared reality in a country of enormous physical and cultural differences.

Recently, the schools as an institution of socialization have been called upon to become an effective institution of learning as well. Neither the social practices of schools nor the theories of learning and teaching were equal to such a task. The study of learning as a process has just begun. To put into practice in the schools theories of learning which do not destroy children's own attempts at learning is difficult even when there is no ideological conflict between the functions of the school and the children's home community; where such an ideological conflict exists, it is almost impossible to implement meaningful theories of learning into practice.

In our ignorance, and beset by conflict, we have blamed the children whose skills, acquired in the settings of their community, matched poorly with those required for survival in the schools. The promise of the sixties was that improvement in the educational accomplishments of children of the poor would in turn eradicate poverty and inequality. This assumption has been challenged by Christopher Jencks. I would like to examine the consequences of this belief, as it is a pervasive one among many educators.

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It has been argued that by improving the language skills of minority children or the reading achievements of the young in Appalachia, we would help the children and their parents gain some hitherto inaccesible benefits. But, more frequently than not, selective efforts at changing children, without concomitant changes in the fabric of life of their communities, have resulted in temporary and elusive gains. In part, the limited effectiveness of compensatory education rests in poor educational practice. But a more profound reason for its failure is that lasting knowledge must be culturally supported and socially practiced; such knowledge is never a "hothouse" product.

It is important to note that the efforts at compensatory education were most successful in communities where they were linked with other on-going community programs affecting the nutrition, health and employment of adults as well as the literacy of the children. Where parents became paid participants in schools and clinics, and thus changed to a small degree the institutions which were committed to changing their children, educational improvements were of some consequence.

In the large urban schools, early gains due to Headstart and Follow Through programs were wiped out in subsequent years. (A finding of particular importance in connection with the much-acclaimed Bereiter programs.) Bilingual programs are frequently but a translation of approaches in English, saturated with the same values as earlier curricului, reflecting the beliefs of the dominant society. After a short-lived and enthusiastic

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endorsement of innovation, teachers unequal to the task and baffled by contrasting pressures, espoused once more their original beliefs--that poor children were inadequately endowed. The widespread exposure of Jensen further strengthened this educational backlash--a process well-documented by Professor Hunt in his paper prepared for this conference.

Nevertheless, the pressures on poor children continue, based on the mistaken and Puritanical belief that if only they are sufficiently urged and punished, extolled and rewarded, they will improve in their committment to schooling and in their academic performance. These children are catalogued, measured and deemed wanting the moment they enter school; they are tested before they are instructed. The teacher becomes a judge; the class' standing in reading and arithmetic a yardstick of collective failure; and the fear of inadequacy pervades the classroom, suffocating teacher and pupil alike. Even the youngest child steeped in this atmosphere prefers to say, "I don't know" rather than risk being wrong. Laura Harris found that three-year-old, Black nursery school children displayed this syndrome of withdrawal, a syndrome also well-documented by William Labov in his ingenious studies.[8]

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8. One of the most exciting observations in our current study of children in Pueblo classrooms is the absence of such internalized defeatism among these children. Their feelings of self-worth and their eagerness to engage in learning does not seem to be impaired in those schools where parents and tribal leaders have significant educational decision-making power. (Osterreich, H. and John, V.: Progress Report No. 2)

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The commitment to widespread and frequent testing persists inspite of evidence that young children are extraordinarily sensitive to judgement and evaluation. In one study in New York's Puerto Rican community, Thomas, Hertzig et al[9] found significant examiner effects on children's tested performance. Stylistic differences between two examiners, both Spanish-speaking, well-trained members of the children's ethnic community, resulted in consistently higher performance by those children tested by the woman-examiner who perceived them as friendly, capable and cooperative. She knew them well, and still made special efforts to put them at ease. On the WISC intelligence test, the children examined by tester A (described above) scored higher on the full scale. Verbally-loaded tests revealed greater differences than performance tests. The children's spontaneous language was more extensive and more complex when tested by the familiar and sympathetic examiner than the language elicited by examiner B.

These findings are of interest for many reasons. They demonstrate the importance of motivational variables and they underline the importance of the contexts in which performance is elicited from poor children. The susceptibility of verbal performances to different social settings has been argued by psycholinguists[10] and it has been shown to be the case in this study of Puerto Rican children.

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9. Thomas, Alexander, Hertzig, Margaret E., Dryman, Irving and Fernandez, Paulina. "Examiner effect in IQ testing of Puerto Rican working-class children." In: Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry and Child Development, 1972 edited by Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas. New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers.
10. Cazden, C. "The neglected situation in child language research and education. In: Language and Poverty edited by F. Williams, Markham, 1970.

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In the continuing debate over the role of language in thought and the role of language in educability--a debate of consequence to those concerned with compensatory education--the importance of the contexts of elicitation of verbal and non-verbal skills is not often stressed. In both instances, qualitative aspects of the intellectual tasks which give rise to the elaboration of existing competence and the development of new competencies are of great complexity. Children vary in their dominant mode of conceptualization--a variation due in part to cultural and in part to individual features of their environments. The ways in which they translate the raw data of their experiences into internal representations may be heavily saturated with language, or images, or schemas linked to more than one of the senses.

It is difficult to determine from an individual's overt behavior the kind of representation which is dominant in his/her thought process. Studies of learning styles have given us some insight into these issues. The work of Stodolsky and Lesser[11] and the findings of Carol Feldman[12] among Eskimo children who were found to excel in non-verbal tasks of abstraction, illustrate the kinds of information being gathered. These studies highlight the co-variation of cultural and cognitive processes.

Children who are secure in their cognitive and social skills when actualizing their knowledge by means of words

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11. Stodolsky, Susan S. and Lesser, Gerald. "Learning patterns in the disadvantaged." Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 37, Fall, 1967, p. 546-593.
12. Feldman, Carol. University of Chicago research reported in Human Behavior Magazine.

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tend to be middle-class children. Because they share with their teachers a heavy reliance upon words as tools of thought and well-rehearsed social rountines which govern verbal interactions, they have an easier time performing that which they have learned in the classroom. The school situation bears many commonalities with the settings in which they first learned these skills. The "gap" of which we speak so often exists, therefore, between the contexts of learning and the contexts of performing. This "gap" is, of course, greater for those children who live in communities which are not part of the mainstream culture.

The need to develop a more effective match between children's styles of learning and the teaching styles of their teachers has been discussed during the past decade. The concern for this issue and the solutions which have been suggested suffer from the same limitations found in many other well-meaning efforts at improving the educational opportunities of the poor. New methods are suggested in the context of an existing structure--namely, the self-contained classroom with one or two teachers. It has been argued that if teachers are better prepared and more knowledgeable about the children in their classes, they will then be able to modify their ways of teaching to fit the learning styles of the children.

Such an expectation is unrealistic of any individual, however devoted and capable. It is rooted in the unrealistic belief that a chosen method of teaching can be relied upon to change pupils as well as teachers. It has been argued above

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that lasting and significant learning requires a strongly motivated, growing individual who practices and rehearses basic skills over a long period of time. This is true of adults as well as children. Teachers are at their best when they remain learners themselves and share with children those aspects of their knowledge and experiences which are alive and rewarding to them. The sources of this knowledge and experience span, in most cases, a teacher's entire life and cannot be changed or modified with each new educational fad. Its strengths, as well as its limitations, are rooted in the teacher's own past. When the background of the teacher differs greatly from that of the children (s)he works with, it has become the practice to add a second teacher or aide from the children's own community--a step in the right direction, but a limited solution.

The alternative is not to be limited to two teachers in a single physical structure, but rather to develop opportunities for learning and schooling in <u>many settings</u>. The resistance to such an obvious notion, particularly for the education of young children, grows out of many practical considerations. A more basic cause, however, is our unshakeable belief in the traditional function of schools, as institutions of socialization. The school building is <u>the</u> setting where shared values, beliefs, tastes and habits are imparted to children of many cultures. The rejection of this ideological function of schools in favor of an alternative view that children develop their ethical and social mores in the context of their

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communities, is an important aspect of pluralism. Today, in the shadow of Watergate, there is a challenge to and re-examination of, long held beliefs which have governed this society. Spokespeople of all movements in this country are seeking the opportunity to generate new and better ways of developing their own syntheses of meaningful values.

We suggest that one way to build upon this ferment is by relaxing the grip which schools have upon children; schooling might then become more effective for young, poor children, after all. The notion is simple; but for those of us who have worked and grown within schools and universities throughout our lives, it is a difficult one to relate to. Schools are battlegrounds in many communities (see Dumont[13]); but for many of us, they have been havens. They have their own traditions which are extraordinarily difficult to change unless it is understood that teaching and learning can take place better inside as well as outside school walls. Today's schools are much too drab and monotonous settings, and teachers are too deeply products of their own past and their overlearned habits, to be able to offer to children, in the isolation of a classroom, the diversity of skills needed to create a genuinely pluralistic society. If schools were to become community buildings and if children and teachers had access to the varied settings of their communities, then teachers could become but one group of adults helping children to learn.

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13. Dumont, Robert V., Jr. "Learning English and how to be silent: Studies in Sioux and Cherokee classrooms." In: Functions of Language in the Classroom edited by Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John and Dell Hymes. New York: Teachers College Press, 1972.

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In summary, we have put forth three basic arguments: (1) that a new process-oriented education for poor children can not be implemented in schools which have failed to resolve the ideological tensions between oppressed communities and their educational institutions; (2) that the focus upon children as targets of change in the war on poverty--a focus which did not include entire communities in programmatic efforts to eradicate poverty--created new problems without necessarily solving old ones; and (3) that teachers cannot respond productively to the learning and thinking styles of children which are different from their own unless we develop new forms and structures for schooling.